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Colby hints new CIA secret forays to build U.S. prestige

By Thomas B. Ross
Sun-Times Bureau

WASHINGTON — CIA Director William E. Colby indicated Wednesday that, as a result of the collapse of U.S. policy in Vietnam, the Central Intelligence Agency may have to step up its secret operations around the world.

Colby said that, because of an easing of tensions with the Soviet Union and China, the CIA is conducting "very few clandestine operations other than pure intelligence collection these days."

"But I must point out," he added, "that this changed world seems to be changing again. Our country might again need the capability to provide some quiet influence or assistance to friends abroad without engaging the formal diplomatic or military might of the United States."

Colby chose his words carefully for a speech to the Commonwealth Club of California in San Francisco. But he appeared to be saying the United States will seek to restore its prestige and the confidence of allies in the post-Vietnam era

by unleashing the CIA in such troublespots as Portugal.

Colby made a vigorous appeal for public support to prevent Congress from imposing major new restrictions on the CIA, particularly a proposal to ban secret involvement in other countries.

He spoke out with the full backing of President Ford, who, in several recent statements, has strongly defended the CIA and the continued use of secret operations.

Colby insisted the CIA's "missteps" have been "few and far between" but that it has, nonetheless, been subjected to a "hysterical focus" on "alleged and imagined sins."

He contended the CIA is now concentrating on intelligence collection, largely through sophisticated electronic means, and that the "Mata Hari, James Bond" image is "no longer valid."

Even so, he defended "clandestine collection" because it alerts the CIA to major new developments before weapons are put in the field and while they are only "in the minds of foreign leaders or in their research laboratories."

Colby argued in advance against an expected finding by the Senate Intelligence Committee that the CIA has been conducting secret operations illegally. Congressional staff experts are known to be combing records to demonstrate that the original legislation setting up the CIA was designed to limit it to intelligence gathering.

But Colby maintained that "following the centuries-old tradition abroad that nations conduct but do not discuss intelligence, the laws which in 1947 established today's permanent structure of American

intelligence were deliberately phrased in circumlocutions and left broad gray areas."

Sen. Frank Church (D-Ida.) and Sen. John G. Tower (R-Tex.), chairman and vice chairman of the Senate committee, conferred Wednesday afternoon with Vice President Nelson A. Rockefeller, chairman of Ford's CIA commission.